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LARRY CRAIG

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NEWS RELEASE

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A Sterling Three-peat
by Senator Larry Craig

Just a few days ago, the Congressional Management Foundation recognized the best websites in Congress and awarded my website, <http://craig.senate.gov>, a Silver Mouse award. Overall, the CMF ranked my website as the seventh best in the United States Senate. Special recognition was also given in the CMF report to a handful of congressional sites – mine included – that have consistently been recognized for excellence. The awards have been given four times, and mine has been selected three of those four times. I am one of just 11 members of Congress to have been chosen so often.

I'm not alone in earning a Silver Mouse this year, however. Senator Mike Crapo received one for his website, too. It's pretty remarkable for both senators from the same state to be so honored, and in that regard, Idahoans are fortunate. Although a good website may seem like a luxury for some members of Congress, in Idaho, it is a necessity.

Some Idahoans live hours away from my nearest regional office. It's not uncommon for people in these areas to need assistance in dealing with a federal agency. Unfortunately, before the Internet, a person in Salmon, for instance, would have to drive three hours, one way, to my Idaho Falls office to fill out the appropriate paperwork. Or they would have to request the forms over the phone, and wait for them to be delivered by mail.

It was extremely inconvenient, but my website changed all that. Today, Idahoans can click on the "Services" section of my website and download privacy release forms, applications for an internship or nomination to one of our nation's military academies. Anything Idahoans can do by visiting their nearest regional office, such as ordering flags or requesting congressional tours of Washington, DC, can be done online by visiting my website. Of course, my staff is just a phone call away should you need assistance, and their phone numbers are located on my website as well.

I've also found that the website makes it easier for Idahoans to get in touch with me, and that is important. Communication between citizens and their elected officials is one of the foundations of our representative republic. Just since 2004, constituent correspondence to my office has steadily increased. That year, we received more than 42,000 pieces of correspondence. The next year, it went up to 55,000, then 81,000, and then 107,000 this last year. E-mail messages submitted through the website continue to drive this growth. This stream of correspondence helps me keep a pulse on the issues that are important to Idaho.

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While I do my best to listen, it's also important for me to communicate my position on the issues of the day and why I voted a certain way on a bill or amendment. Not surprisingly, CMF rated the information on my website dealing with current issues and legislative process as "exceptional." The "Issues" section of my website contains detailed issue briefings, special reports and new features, such as my "Hot Topics" page and a "Fact or Fiction" page, where you can see if a rumor you heard about the government is true (No, the Postal Service isn't going to tax e-mail messages).

I have also added a great deal of audio and video content to my website. My "Idaho Newsreel" offers video of events I have hosted or attended while traveling in the state and my innovative "Podchats" offer my answers to questions submitted by Idahoans.

It doesn't stop there. Having said all this though, much of the website's content is there because people like you asked for it. I hope you will continue to send me suggestions for new ideas and new things that would be helpful, or that you'd like to see. It's input like this that has made the site what it is today.

The website conveys a lot of information about a lot of different issues, but it exists for one reason: to deliver timely, high quality service to Idaho citizens.